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ABSTRACT

Group processes are an integral part of the educational enterprise, but "effectiveness of group processes" does not necessarily follow from the simple act of group formation. The administrator has the responsibility of exercising effective group leadership. Group formation, group task functions or assignments, and decision-making processes are discussed. The process of decision-making is placed in a conceptual framework, and from selected criteria for judging leadership styles, leadership is defined, research findings cited, and the transactional style proposed as an appropriate leadership style for the administrator interacting effectively with individuals in group processes. Those in the field of education should reconceptualize the total educational enterprise as a cooperative, social venture, with a view toward increased organizational effectiveness and improvement of current decision-making practices. (Author/MLF)

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GROUP DYNAMICS: TOWARD A STUDY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE/ SUPERVISORY LEADERSHIP ROLE WITHIN GROUP DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

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> Most school people appear to believe that getting things done through groups--of children, teachers, parents, administrators, supervisors--is not just a good idea but a natural, essential part of the educational enterprise. Yet group work, instead of being a productive and psychologically satisfying experience, is often unrewarding, puzzling, and frustrating. . . . For most adults of today, the abilities required to work effectively as a leader or member of a cooperative group do not come naturally, perhaps because our traditional educational system has generally ignored or discouraged shared effort.[1]

Considering the pressures under which most educational personnel work daily, and the inherent social nature of their work, it would seem paradoxical that often opportunities for authentic communication among many of these personnel, such as teachers, are quite minimal. Given that this is so, and that most adults do indeed inherently lack the ability to interact effectively in groups, the vital importance of group processes, or group dynamics, is underscored.

It is imperative, then, for those involved in any processes having to do with reaching agreement on goals, or programs, or planned change, or improvement of instruction, to be competent in the use of the time which they devote to group functions. Schmuck and Runkel emphasize this point by positing the Gestalt nature of schools, and stating:

> The school is more than simply the sum total of its individual members and curriculum materials. The total school staff has characteristics different from those of its individual members, and, if the staff is effectively managed, it may have a greater productive capacity than would be expected from a simple summing up of individual resources. . . . It is the strength of "sharedness" that makes a school organization so resistant to modification, but, at the same time, offers a tool for planned change.[2]

To the administrators very often fall the tasks of promoting the strengths derived from "sharedness" and, simultaneously, of utilizing organizational cohesiveness to bring about planned change in the form of educational improvement. Castetter views the administrative (or supervisory) task, therefore, as related to the motivation of the individual teacher; as one of encouragement and the promotion of self-sufficiency, so that organizational demands will be fulfilled and human needs, such as self-realization, recognition, and status can be satisfied.[3] Toward this end, groups are formed to perform certain selected tasks. These groups invariably involve "face to face participation of school personnel . . . who come together to perform a service or task related to the school system."[4] The task necessarily requires the group members' cooperation,[5] and the "group process" generally exists as a temporal dynamic entity--a dynamic process--in a constant state of change over time.[6]

Groups are typically assigned five basic functions: planning, appraising, communicating, advising, and educating.[7] Examples of the planning function include such considerations as formulating a system-wide development program for professional personnel or developing educational specifications for a new school building (although the latter, admittedly, may no longer be a common task given current economic conditions). Appraising might entail considering the effectiveness of a course of study or curriculum. Communicating could involve explaining and interpreting program provisions to staff members, while advising might concern the

acquisition of instructional resources. Educating could relate to the development of in-service programs of a specific nature or to supervisory meetings wherein various uses of innovative instructional materials are demonstrated and discussed.

Implications for effective administrative/supervisory involvement become increasingly clear when one considers that group decisions in regard to matters such as have been mentioned have been found superior to decisions made unilaterally. Schmuck and Runkel offer support for this contention:

> Studies of group decision-making and problem-solving have indicated that decisions produced by individuals interacting in a group are usually superior to decisions produced by individuals when certain kinds of tasks are to be carried out.[8]

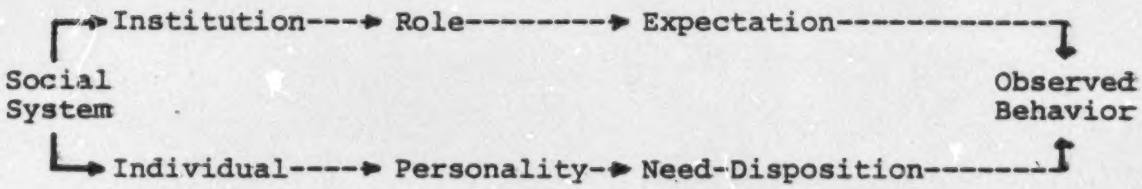
They further stipulate that complex tasks are more conducive to group consideration than simple tasks:

> . . . in the case of problems that are complex, that have many alternative paths or orders of sub-tasks through which the problem can be attacked, in which the elements are not easily discerned or conceptualized, in which one person can do one sub-task without interfering with another, and, in particular, where the efficacy of the solution depends on the continued cooperation of a number of persons, then the decision will almost always be superior if it is produced by a group, in comparison to being produced even by the most capable of individuals.[9]

Rationale for this phenomenon may be found by examining a schemata designed to show the relationship of the individual to the organizational structure. Getzels and Guba posit that observed behavior of an individual in an organizational social system setting such as a school is the result of two interacting dimensions--the Nomothetic and the Idiographic.[10] These dimensions

have been represented pictorially in the following manner:[11]

Nomothetic or Organizational Dimension



Idiographic or Personal Dimension

Upon examination of the Getzels-Guba Model, it becomes evident that the individual in an organizational setting exists within a force field, with the forces not necessarily complementary but often in opposition. Castetter maintains that human complications are precipitated by certain organizational arrangements, and that possible adverse results may take one or more of the following forms:

1. Lack of clarity in lines of responsibility and authority
2. Assumption of line functions by staff personnel
3. Expressive lines of authority
4. Dual or multiple jurisdiction
5. Lack of understanding of organizational relationships
6. Lack of coordination
7. Failure to grant authority to make decisions at the point of action[12]

Argyris pursues similar reasoning, stating that there is a lack of congruency between the needs of healthy individuals and the demands of the formal organization; resultant individual

frustration, failure, and conflict are distinct possibilities; subordinates may experience competition, hostility, and attend to parts of the organization rather than to the whole.[13] The administrative or supervisory task, then, may also become one of attempting to minimize deleterious organizational possibilities, and the group process viewed as an increasingly functional strategy, for the literature on conformity of individuals reports a particularly stable finding: A person in a pressure situation is generally liberated somewhat from that pressure when provided with a partner or others who may think alike, or similarly agree with him.[14] Benefits expected to accrue, therefore, from the group process are the development of better understanding of organizational goals; more effective solutions to problems and decision-making; encouragement of creativity among staff members; improved instruction, motivation, and morale; opportunities for the development of leadership; and better organizational formal and informal communication.[15]

To the extent that a group will be deemed "successful" necessarily depends upon the quality of group decisions and upon the skills of the individual group members as exercised in coordinating their respective resources and efforts.[16] In working to achieve any of the above-mentioned benefits, three decision-making styles have been observed to occur often in groups:

1. Decisions made by a single person or a minority of a group
2. Decisions based on the ability of a majority to overrule a minority

3. Decisions based on support and agreement of the total group after debate and discussion[17]

Decisions emanating from the minority sub-group style have been found to be the least effective in using human resources available to the group, generally not of high quality, and poor in obtaining the commitment of group members.[18] The minority (or one person) decision has also been found to be relatively poor because of the absence of mutual probing and stimulation.[19] Of the second decision-making style, the following is reported:

> The majority-vote style relies more . . . on the combined effects produced by interaction and the resources of most individuals. As such, it is superior to the minority in producing effective decisions. However, some assets are still being wasted when the majority vote is used. To the extent that the out-voted or non-involved minority are unable to use their resources and to influence the decision, there are still some resources not being brought to bear on the decision.[20]

In light of this finding and with a view toward minimizing possible negative consequences resulting from overconfidence in the majority decision-making style, the "achievement of consensus" would seem the most efficacious. This style represents a maximized interaction pattern in which all participants contribute resources and share in the final decision; no decision is final that does not involve the approval of nearly all members; but consensus decisions are, unfortunately, often difficult--and sometimes impossible--to obtain.[21] "Observations indicate, however, that the method of consensus, when applied to complex problems requiring complex interpersonal coordination, results in decisions of superior quality which are usually well

implemented."[22]

Some studies of group dynamics have placed these decision-making styles within a conceptual framework of three variables: Attraction and Hostility, Conformity, and Communication.[23] It has been found that a set of filtering factors appears to operate during the development of interpersonal attraction;[24] the most basic consideration in this regard is spatial or physical propinquity. Spatial propinquity tends to lead to social propinquity, with a resultant articulation of interdependent roles and ultimate psychic propinquity.[25] Persons of similar status rank, attitudes, and values become attracted to each other, while dislike develops among different persons from possible frustration over potential losses of regard, status, or security.[26] Conversely, those within the group who are perceived to minimize or reduce any threat of status loss become more attractive to those who feel threatened.[27]

Norms are rules which specify generally the behaviors within a group setting which are acceptable to the group; when a member deviates from accepted norms, other members of the group will communicate with him in an attempt to induce conformity.[28] One will likely conform if unclear about what is being discussed, if the majority holding a contrary opinion is large, when the deviant opinion is to be expressed publicly, when the group is perceived as being composed of experts, or when a question has been discussed until consensus is reached.[29]

Communication is more likely to be positive when a group perceives itself as being cooperative rather than competitive.[30] Symptoms of high cohesiveness are evident in cooperative groups; members of such a group are more friendly, make more attempts to influence one another, and accept influence attempts more readily.[31] Harris has cited studies showing that groups may be subject to covert as well as overt communication, with covert communication being termed by Bradford, "the hidden agenda."[32] The hidden agenda may do much to thwart the efforts of any group in acting upon the true or public agenda, but Bradford points out that conflict may be minimized in this regard by the utilization of certain effective leadership techniques.[33] Explicitly recommended as pragmatic procedures for the exercising of effective leadership are the following:

1. Look for hidden agendas (sic) that are present. . . .
2. Remember that the group is continuously working on two levels at once. . . .
3. Try to make it easier for the group to bring its hidden agenda to the surface. . . .
4. Be sensitive to whether the group is ready to face its hidden agendas. . . .
5. Don't scold or pressure the group because it has hidden agendas. . . .
6. Help the group to remove feelings of guilt about hidden agendas. . . .
7. Help the group work out methods of solving their hidden agendas just as they develop methods of handling their surface (or public) agenda. . . .
8. Help the group evaluate its progress in handling hidden agendas.[34]

These procedures have implication for the type of leadership that may be conducive to effective group functioning. In formulating such a leadership type, Miles suggests that rather than

concentrating upon the static term "leader," a functional approach be taken to examining the dynamic term "leadership"; this focus, he contends, lends itself to a concern with "effective group behavior" and is consistent with the belief that leadership cannot be truly understood without reference to an immediate, specific situation.[35]

Miles stipulates the following useful criteria for judging and analyzing leadership:

> Augmentation: Does the leadership act augment or facilitate group members' positive search for need satisfaction? Or does it accentuate the negative--threaten people with punishment or loss of present satisfactions if they do not perform as desired by the leader?
>
> Effectiveness and Efficiency: Does the leadership act aid the group to do its job rapidly and well (effectiveness), besides improving internal working relationships (efficiency)? Or does it tend to evoke a group product of poor quality and feelings of low morale and antagonism?
>
> Learning: Following the leadership act, have other group members grown--either in knowledge of the subject matter they are working on or in ability to contribute effectively to working groups? Or do they remain at their previous level of knowledge and skill?[36]

With these criteria as a reference-base, and given that observation may lead to conceptualization, it would seem possible that the administrator could now attempt to operationally define leadership, discover salient facts relevant to positive group-leadership behavior, and formulate a potentially useful personal leadership type for use when working in groups. That there is a distinction between "leadership" and "leader" has already been cited. Schmuck views, too, the concept of "leader" as being static, while "leadership" is seen as being dynamic.[37] He states:

> "Leadership" refers to behavior that brings a group closer to achieving its goals and is defined as interpersonal influence central to group action. It is differentiated from the concept of leader; the term "leader" identifies the person who has been appointed or elected to be the "head man."[38]

It becomes evident from this thinking on "leadership" that any member of a group may exert leadership "to the extent that the properties of the group are modified by his presence in the group."[39] How to bring about a modification in group properties or behavior while attending to hidden agendas and simultaneously being subject to possible "leadership-type scrutiny" by other members of the group is a question that must necessarily be confronted by the administrator if in a group leadership position. Research acts as an aid here, and indicates that effective group leadership provides for and encourages minority opinions and conflict to a greater extent than less effective group leadership behavior.[40]

Group participants with little influence over a decision will not only fail to contribute resources but will be less likely to carry out the decision when action is required. Therefore, the effective leader, or one who is in the group-leadership position, would allow for greater participation, initially wider divergence of expressed judgments, and greater acceptance of diverse decisions than would the less effective leader.[41]

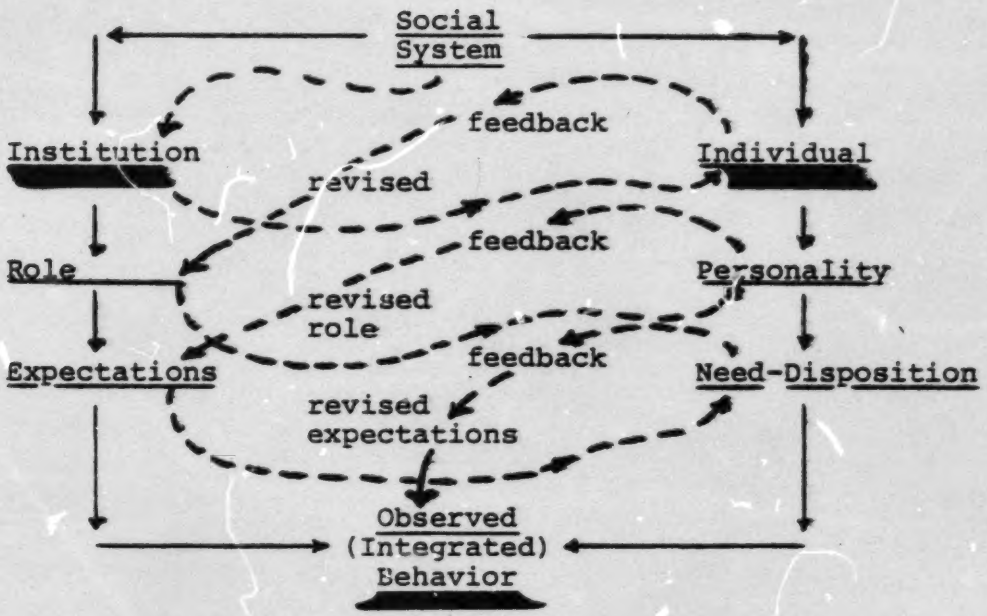
It has been repeatedly found that "participative leadership" has a greater influence on group judgments, and Harris believes that this phenomenon provides evidence supporting a "shirt

sleeves" approach to leadership rather than an "advisory" approach.[42] "It suggests that supervisors [or administrators] who can become a part of working groups are likely to have group activities which are more satisfying to participants and which influence their thinking in relation to the group task."[43]

In formulating an appropriate and utilitarian personal leadership "type," the administrator might find it beneficial to return to a consideration of the Nomothetic and Ideographic Dimensions designating the individual's involvement in an organizational setting. The Nomothetic Dimension style of leadership places emphasis on the requirements of the institution, the institutional role, and the institutional expectations, rather than upon the need-dispositions of the individual. The Idiographic Dimension style, conversely, places emphasis upon the individual, his personality and need-dispositions rather than upon institutional requirements.[44] Getzels and Guba have offered an intermediate, and extremely useful, leadership "typology"--the Transactional Style--in which

> Expectations are defined as sharply as they can be but not so sharp as to prohibit appropriate behavior in terms of needs-dispositions. Role conflicts, personality conflicts and role-personality conflicts are recognized and handled. The standard of . . . excellence is individual integration and efficiency, satisfaction, and institutional adjustment and effectiveness.[45]

In terms of the Getzels-Guba Model depicted earlier, the Transactional leadership style may involve the individual in the organizational setting as represented on the next page. The



transactional style seems to provide the degree of flexibility required to facilitate effective group functioning. The administrator utilizing this type of leadership may find tasks such as solidifying organizational cohesiveness and providing for planned educational improvement somewhat facilitated, for in the Transactional style is incorporated the concept of "revision" due to individual differences among group members--a product of hidden agendae. The Transactional style also presupposes an active role in group processes for the administrator, and would serve in congruence with the dynamic leadership concept, the shirt-sleeve approach, and research findings.

It has been stipulated that group processes are an integral part of the educational enterprise, but that "effectiveness of group processes" does not necessarily follow from the simple act of group formation. The Gestalt nature of schools,

based upon staff interaction and leadership, has been contended, and so to the administrator has been placed the responsibility of exercising effective group leadership. Group formation and group task functions or assignments have been discussed. Group decision-making processes have also been discussed, and the relative effectiveness of consensus-method decision-making rationalized by use of the Nomothetic-Idiographic dichotomy. The lack of congruence between these dimensions has been emphasized, and implications for administrative/supervisory behavior posited in the form of benefits expected to accrue from effective group processes.

The process of decision-making has been placed in a conceptual framework of three elements: Attraction and Hostility, Conformity, and Communication. Of these, communication has been the primary focus of examination, and possible covert communication among group members was utilized to demonstrate pragmatic concerns of group leaders. From this, and from selected criteria for judging leadership styles, leadership was defined, research findings cited, and the Transactional style proposed as an appropriate leadership style for the administrator interacting effectively with individuals in group processes.

Since it has been found that "most school staffs do not fully use staff resources or employ a consensus decision-making style,"[46] it would seem imperative for those in the field of education to seriously reconceptualize the total educational enterprise as a cooperative, social venture, with a view toward

increased organizational effectiveness and improvement of current decision-making practices. In conjunction with this assertion, it follows that groups should be utilized for educational decision-making processes, and group leadership--as a crucial element of group processes--be studied by prospective or incumbent administrators. Such concerns might positively contribute to enlivened, effective schools--characterized by healthy organizational processes[47]--and with environments conducive to educational improvement through communication clarity, group cohesiveness, supportive norms such as valuing authenticity and openness, mutual trust among staff members, and a genuine concern for the thoughts and feelings of colleagues.[48]

Footnotes

[1]Matthew B. Miles, Learning to Work in Groups (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1959), p. 1.

[2]Richard A. Schmuck and Philip J. Runkel, A Preliminary Manual for Organizational Training in Schools (Eugene, Oregon: Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, October 1968), p. 1.

[3]William B. Castetter, Administering the School Personnel Program (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1962), p. 66.

[4]Ibid., p. 67.

[5]Miles, Learning . . . , p. 3.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Castetter, Administering . . . , p. 68.

[8]A Preliminary Manual . . . , p. 1.

[9]Ibid., p. 2, emphasis added.

[10]Jacob W. Getzels and Egon Guba, "Social Behavior and the Administrative Process," School Review, LXV (Winter 1957), 423-441, as cited in Ralph B. Kimbrough, Administering Elementary Schools (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1968), p. 34.

[11]Jacob W. Getzels, "A Psycho-Sociological Frame-Work for the Study of Educational Administration," Harvard Educational Review, 22 (Fall 1952): 235-246, modified, as cited in Willard S. Elsbree, Harold J. McNally, and Richard Wynn, Elementary School Administration and Supervision (New York: American Book Co., 1967), p. 15.

[12]Castetter, Administering . . . , p. 74.

[13]Chris Argyris, Understanding Organizational Behavior (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1960), pp. 14-18, as cited in Castetter, Administering . . . , p. 60.

[14]Vernon L. Allen and Darren L. Newtson, Conformity, Anticonformity and Independence, Technical Report #88 (Madison, Wisconsin: Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Cognitive Learning, The University of Wisconsin, June 1969), p. 1.

[15]Castetter, Administering . . . , pp. 68-69.

[16]Schmuck and Runkel, A Preliminary Manual . . . , p. 2.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid., pp. 2-3.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Richard A. Schmuck, "Group Processes," Encyclopedia of Educational Research, ed. Robert E. Ebel (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1969), p. 555.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Everett K. Wilson, Sociology: Rules, Roles, and Relationships (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1966), p. 272.

[26]Schmuck, "Group . . . ," p. 555.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid., p. 556.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander, Group Dynamics (White Plains: Row, Peterson and Co., 1953), p. 81.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Leland P. Bradford, "The Case of the Hidden Agenda," as cited in Ben M. Harris, Supervisory Behavior in Education (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 236-246.

[33]Ibid., pp. 244-246.

[34]Ibid., pp. 245-246.

[35]Miles, Learning . . . , p. 15.

[36]Ibid., pp. 18-19.

[37]Schmuck, "Group . . . ," p. 554.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Cartwright and Zander, Group . . . , pp. 538-539.

[40]Schmuck and Runkel, A Preliminary Manual . . . , p. 4.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Harris, Supervisory Behavior . . . , pp. 391-392.

[43]Ibid., p. 392.

[44]Getzels and Guba, p. 430, as cited in Castetter, Administering . . . , p. 78.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Schmuck and Runkel, A Preliminary Manual . . . , p. 5.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid.

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